

BCUR 2019: Report by Mara Balasa

The British Conference of Undergraduate Research was the wonderful beginning of a future research-oriented career. It was there that I truly realised how impactful research can be and how constructive it is to share your findings with others and receive helpful comments and suggestions from fellow researchers. Discussions were fruitful and covered a wide range of topics, some of which I have never thought I would come across in this context. Ranging from the European Union process of Spitzenkandidaten, to measures of wolf reintroduction, mid-aged solo female travellers, seabird breeding, or fitness influencers on Instagram, each presentation was unique and researched in-depth. On top of that, I could see how passionate everyone was about their research and how that passion and dedication helped achieve fantastic results.

I believe that what we all had in common was that we realised we knew more than we thought. Of course, no matter how much we tried to narrow down and find out everything about each area we researched, there were still unknown elements attached to it, new angles. That is precisely why conferences such as BCUR play a significant role in our research journey: before presenting, one identifies the main takeaways of the research; while presenting, one truly discovers their own strengths and weaknesses; after presenting, one can incorporate all the constructive feedback received from the participants into further research and future work.

The biggest challenge I encountered was related to translating my research into terms everyone could understand, as the audience was composed of students who were studying various, unrelated degrees. To quote the BCUR host and Head of the School of Humanities at the University of South Wales, Dr. Andrew Thompson, "it is not easy to make an abstract both sufficiently technical and disciplinary specific and yet also accessible to non-specialists". These words described perfectly my challenge, as I had to make choices: should I include all regressions, or not? Should I keep the large results table, or not?

When I started drafting my presentation, my slides were first full of text, Greek letters and some numbers. I looked at it, and I wondered when I became one of *'those people'* to fill each page of their presentation with technical vocabulary. Only then I realised that I have learned a lot over the past three years, and I started reorganising my presentation, as I knew I did not need each word to be written there. I was the one who wrote them in the first place, so that meant I could also speak about them, without having the back-up. My presentation therefore became very aesthetic, but more importantly, understandable.

My second challenge was to talk slowly. We only had 10 minutes to present and 5 minutes of questions and, having spent a good part of the past year working on my research, it was a daunting task to compress all results into only 10 minutes. However, that is when I learned that including only the main results and implications was the recipe for success. For more details, I said, the audience could talk to me afterwards and I will explain more in depth. And they did. Some of the participants found me after my presentation and wanted to know more details on the methods employed in my research, which in the end sparked a great conversation about gravity.

To summarise, this conference was about stepping out of my comfort zone. It made me realise what I know well and what could be improved, while also making me conscious of the impact of research. During the opening ceremony, we all wrote a poem about ourselves, about what we love, fear, think. I am not going to reproduce it here, but I am just going to conclude by saying that sometimes it is great to take a step back and reflect on this. You will find a new perspective (and if not, at least you will have fun and laugh about your improvable writing skills).